

THE MADNESS OF LORD HARRY CULVERHOUSE.

Seeing that my father Henry is dead, and that I am king, seeing also that I am no longer a bachelor, but a married man (and here he bowed to Margaret of Tuscany, his newly wedded wife, and seeing that Osa is turned 20 years of age—why, we are all going to be sober folk at Streisau on this day forward, and we are going to play no more pranks. Here's a pledge of it." And, having said this, King Rudolf III took a deep draught of wine.

At this moment the ushers announced that the Lord Harry Culverhouse had come to take his leave of their majesties and of the princess. This gentleman had accompanied the embassy that came from England to congratulate the king on his marriage, and he had staid some months in Streisau, very eagerly acceding to the king's invitation to prolong his visit, for such were his folly and headstrong passion that he had fallen most desperately in love with the fair face of Princess Osa and could not endure to live out of her presence. Yet now he came to bid farewell, and when he was ushered in Rudolf received him with much graciousness and made him a present of his own miniature set in diamonds, while the queen gave him her miniature set in the lid of a golden casket. In return Lord Harry golden the king to accept a richly mounted sword and the queen an ivory fan, painted by the greatest artist of France and bearing her cipher in jewels. Then he came to Princess Osa, and, after having hidden him farewell, said, "I am a poor maid, my lord, and I can give no great gift, but take this pin from my hair and keep it for my sake." And she drew out a golden pin from her hair, a long and sharp pin, bearing for its head her cipher in brilliant, and she gave it to him, smiling.

But he, bowing low and then falling on his knees, offered her a box of red morocco leather, and when she opened it she saw a necklace of rubies of great splendor. The princess flushed red seeing that the gift was most costly. And she would fain have refused it and held it out again to Lord Harry. But he turned swiftly away, and, bowing once more, withdrew. Then the princess said to her brother, "It is too costly."

The king, seeing how splendid the gift was, frowned a little, but then he said: "He must be a man of very great wealth. They are rich in England. I am sorry the gift is so great, but we cannot refuse it without wounding his honor."

So the princess set the ruby necklace with her other jewels and thought for a day or two that Lord Harry was wiser than other men and then forgot him.

Now, Lord Harry Culverhouse, on leaving the king's presence, had mounted his horse, which was a fine charger and splendidly equipped, and ridden alone out of Streisau, for he had dismissed all his servants and dispatched them with suitable gratuities to their own country. He rode through the afternoon, and in the evening he reached a village 15 miles away. Here he stopped at a cottage, and an old man came out and escorted him inside. A candle lay on the table in the little parlor of the cottage.

"Here are the clothes, my lord," said the old man, laying his hand on the bundle.

"And here are mine," answered Lord Harry. "And the horse stands ready for you." With this he began to pull off the fine clothes in which he had had audience of the king, and he opened the bundle and put on the old and plain suit which it contained. Then he held out his hand to the old man, saying, "Give me the 5 crowns, Solomon, and our bargain is complete."

Then Solomon the Jew gave him 5 crowns and bade him farewell, and he placed the crowns in his purse and walked out of the cottage, possessing nothing in the world saving his old clothes, 5 crowns and the golden pin that had fastened the ruddy hair of Princess Osa, for everything else that he had possessed—his lands and houses in England, his horses and carriages, his money, his clothes and all the rest—had he bartered with Solomon the Jew in order that he might buy the ruby necklace which he had given to Princess Osa. Such was the strange madness wrought in him by her face.

It was now late evening, and he walked to and fro all night. In the morning he went to the shop of a barber, and in return for one of his crowns the barber cropped his long curls short and shaved off his mustache and gave him a dye with which he stained his complexion to a darker tint, and he made his face dirty and soiled his hands and roughened the skin of them by chafing them on some flints which lay by the roadside. Then, changing a second crown, he bought a loaf of bread and set off to trudge to Streisau, for in Streisau was Osa, and he would not be anywhere else in the world. And when he had arrived there he went to a servant of the king's guard and prevailed on him by a present of 3 crowns to enlist him as a trooper, and this the servant, having found that Lord Harry could ride and knew how to use his sword, agreed to do. Thus Lord Harry became a trooper in the guard of King Rudolf, having for all his possessions save what the king's stores afforded him, a few pennies and the golden pin that had fastened the hair of Princess Osa. And nobody knew him except Solomon the Jew, and he, having made a good profit, held his peace both then and afterward.

Many a day Lord Harry mounted guard at the palace, and he often saw the king with the queen ride out and back, but they did not notice the face of the trooper. And sometimes he saw the princess also, but she did not look at him, although he could not restrain himself from looking at her; but, since every man looked at her, she had grown accustomed to being gazed at and took no heed of it. But once she wore the ruby necklace, and the breath of the trooper went quick and eager when he saw it on her neck, and a sudden flush of color spread over all his face, so that the princess, chancing to glance at him in passing and seeing the color beneath and through the dye that stained him, was greatly astonished, and she reined in her horse for an instant and looked very intently at him, yet she rode on again in silence.

That evening there came to the quarters of the king's guard a waiting woman, who asked to see the trooper that had mounted guard at the west gate of the palace that day, and when he came the woman held out to him a box of red morocco leather, saying, "It is for you." But he answered, "It is not for me," and, turning away, left her. And this happened on three evenings. Then on the fourth day it was again his turn to mount guard at the palace, and when he had sat there on his horse for an hour the Princess Osa rode out from under the portico. She rode alone, and the ruby necklace was on her neck, and she said: "I am going to ride outside the city by the river bank. Let a trooper follow me some way behind." And she signed with her hand to Lord Harry, and he rode after her through the streets and out of the western gate, and they turned along the bank of the river. When they had gone three or four miles from the city, Osa halted and beckoned the Lord Harry to approach her, and he came. But when she was about to speak to him and tell him that she knew him a sudden madness came on her, and she spurred deep into his horse's flanks, and both the horses bounded forward at a gallop. In alarm the princess cried out, but he did not heed her. Along the bank they galloped, and when they met any one, which happened seldom (for the place was remote and it was now evening), he bade her cover her face, and she obeyed, twining her lace handkerchief over her face. Thus they rode till they came at nightfall to a bluff of rock high above the stream. Here Lord Harry suddenly checked the horses, flung himself from the saddle and bade the princess dismount. And she obeyed and stood facing him, pale with fear and apprehension, but wearing a proud and scornful air. And he cried: "Is it not well you should die? For you live but to madden men and drive them to sin and folly."

"Nay," said she, "to men of good heart beauty is goodness. For yourself come the sin and folly, my lord." And she laid hold of the ruby necklace and broke the clasp of it and flung it on the ground before him, but he took no heed of it, but seized her hand and drew her to the edge of the bluff, saying: "The world will be safer if I fling you down."

Then she looked in his face, and a sudden pity entered her heart, and she said very gently: "Sit down, my lord, and let me put my hands on your brow, for I think you are in a fever."

And he sat down, all trembling and sinking like a man with aague, and she stripped off her gauds and took his forehead between her hands, and he lay there quiet with his head between her hands. And presently his eyes closed and he slept. But Osa did not know what to do, for darkness had fallen and she dared not leave him alone there by the river. Therefore she sat where she was, and in an hour, the night being fine and not cold, she grew weary, and her hands fell away from his brow and she sank back on the green turf, pillow her head on a curved arm, and there she slept with the mad lord by her and the ruby necklace lying near them.

At midnight Lord Harry Culverhouse awoke and saw Princess Osa sleeping peacefully with a smile on her lips as decks a child's lips in sleep. He rose and stood up on his feet, looking at her, and he heard nothing but the sound of the horses cropping the grass a little way off. Then he drew near her and gazed long on her face, and she opened her eyes and saw him. But she showed no fear of him. She smiled at him, and she said: "Even here I am guarded by one of the gentlemen who guard me in the palace." And she closed her eyes again and turned to sleep.

Then a shiver ran through him. And he dug his nails into the palms of his hands and, turning, walked swiftly up and down on the bluff by the side of the river while Osa slept. And presently he fell on his knees beside her and began to murmur in rapid rush of words, but he did not now curse her beauty, but blessed God for it and blessed him also for the preservation of his own honor. Thus he spent the night till day was near, and then he bent over Osa and looked once more on her, and he took up the ruby necklace and laid it lightly about her neck. And, feeling the touch of it, cool and wet from the dew, she again opened her eyes and, putting her knuckles in them, she rubbed gently, and she gasped a little, saying, "Heigh ho, I am sleepy!" and sat up. And she said, "Are you not sleepy, my lord?"

"I am on watch, madam," said Lord Harry Culverhouse.

As the princess sat up the ruby necklace fell from her neck into her lap. Seeing it, she held it up to him, saying: "Take it again and go to your own home. I am sure you gave too great a price for it."

He smiled, for she did not know how great the price was, and he asked: "And must I, in my turn, give back the pin that fastened your hair?"

"Nay, keep the pin. It is worth nothing," she smiled. "Is it safe for me to go to sleep for a little longer?"

"Who would harm you, madam? Even I have not harmed you."

"You!" said she, with a little laugh. "You would not harm me." And she lay down and closed her eyes.

Then Lord Harry Culverhouse sat down on the ground and rested his chin on his knees and clasped his hands about his shins, and he cursed himself bitterly, not now because he meditated any harm to her—but because his mad fury was past and he would have died before a hair of her head should be hurt—but because of the evil that his wild and reckless madness had brought upon her. For he knew that soon there would be a pursuit, and that if she and he were found there it would become known who he was, and her fame would suffer injurious rumors by reason of what he had done. Therefore he made up his mind what he must do next, and he abandoned all dreams that had led him into the foolish adventure on which he had embarked, and put from him the wickedness that had filled his heart when first he carried her to the bluff over the river. And he rose on to his knees and prayed that if his deed were a sin—for it seemed to him rather a necessary thing—then it might be forgiven, but that, in any case, no hurt or harm should befall the Princess Osa by reason of anything that he had done. Finally he commended his soul to God. And then he took the ruby necklace in his hand, and, holding it, walked to the edge of the bluff.

But at this instant the sound of the hoofs of a horse struck on his ear, and the sound was loud and close, and he

had no more time than to turn round before a horse was reined in suddenly near him, and a man leaped from it and ran at him and grappled with him. And then Lord Harry perceived that the man was the king, for when Osa did not return search parties had been sent out, and the king himself headed one, and, having the best horse and being urged on by love and fear for his sister, he had outridden all the rest and had chanced to come alone where Osa and Lord Harry were. And he gripped Lord Harry furiously, cursing him for a scoundrel and demanding what he had done to the princess. Then Lord Harry said: "Do you not know me, sire? I am Lord Harry Culverhouse."

Greatly astonished, the king loosened his hold and fell back a pace, for he did not understand what he heard, but yet knew the voice of his friend. Then, looking down, he beheld Osa sleeping peacefully as a child on the ground, with her cloak spread under her that she might take no harm from the damp. And Lord Harry caught him by the arm, crying, "Are there others coming after you?"

"Aye," said the king, "many others. The whole of the guard are roused and seek her high and low in the city and outside. But how come you here, man?"

Then Lord Harry told the king what he had done, speaking very briefly and hastily, but yet sparing nothing, and when he told him how he had carried off the princess the king's hand flew to the hilt of his sword. But Lord Harry said, "Not yet," and continued to tell the king how Osa had pitied him and how he had watched by her and how she had slept again, bidding him keep the pin. Then, glancing at Osa, he lowered his voice and spoke very quickly and urgently, and the king held out his hand and shook Lord Harry's hand, asking, "Is there no other way?" But Lord Harry shook his head, then he kissed the king's hand, and next he went and kissed Osa's hand very softly and looked for the last time at her face, and he drew the gold pin from his purse and he put it gently and deftly among her hair. And he took the ruby necklace in his own hand and clinched it tight, and he said to King Rudolf: "Sire, there are some in the city that knew me before, but have not known me since I have been in your guard, because I have altered my face. Take care that you so alter it that they do not know me again."

Then the king's breath caught in his throat, for he had loved Lord Harry Culverhouse, and he asked again, "Is there no other way?"

"Hark!" said the other: "I hear the horses of your guard drawing near. I hear them to east and west and north, and do you not see shapes riding? If I ride to the south, across the river? If I ride from here alive, I shall be taken and the truth must be known. For my sake and hers, strike, sire."

Then the king took Lord Harry Culverhouse by the arm and drew him to him, saying: "Must it be so, Harry? And we have lived as friends together."

"The sound of the hoofs is very near, sire."

The king drew himself up to his height and he raised his hat from his head and bowed low to Lord Harry Culverhouse, and he said: "Now praise be to God for the restoration of this gentleman to a sound mind and may Christ grant him mercy for the sake of his honorable death."

And he drew his sword from its sheath and came up to Lord Harry Culverhouse, who stood on the edge of the bluff. The king raised his sword and struck with all his strength, and the head split under the blow, and Lord Harry Culverhouse fell dead from the

bluff into the river, holding the ruby necklace in his clinched hand. And the king shivered and a short sob burst from him.

On this instant arose an eager, glad cry, and 30 of the guard rushed forward, greeting the king and rejoicing to see the princess coming, and she, rubbing her eyes, and she cried: "Where is he? Where is Lord Harry?" And she looked round on the troopers, and they gazed at her, much astonished at hearing what she said. But Rudolf came to her and took her hand, saying: "Why, Osa, you have been dreaming. There is no Lord Harry here. Lord Harry Culverhouse is far off in his own country. Did this rascal of a trooper frighten you?"

Her eyes grew wide in wonder, but before she could speak he turned to the guard, saying: "By heaven's pleasure I came in time to prevent any harm except the loss of a necklace my sister wore, for as I rode up I saw a fellow stooping down by her and fumbling with the clasp of her necklace. He was one of your troop and had hidden out behind her, and as I rode up to him he sprang away from her."

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But one cried, "How came they here?"

"Ah, sister," said the king, fixing his eyes on Osa, "how came you here?"

And she, reading in the king's eyes the answer that he would have said: "The trooper compelled me to come hither with him, and he threatened to kill me if I would not give him my necklace, but I refused, and then he drew a knife and menaced me with it, and I fell into a swoon and knew no more until I awoke and found you here, and now I see that my necklace is gone."

"Bring her horse," the king commanded, "and ride in front and behind. We will return to the city at the best speed we may."

Then he mounted the princess on her horse and rode by her side, supporting her with his arm, and the troopers were some way off in front and behind. And the princess felt the pin again in her hair, and, putting up her hand, she pulled it out, and she said: "He has given me back my pin."

"Of whom do you speak?" asked the king.

"Of Lord Harry Culverhouse. Is he indeed dead, Rudolf?"

"Are you still dreaming?" answered the king, with a laugh. "What had that fellow to do with Harry Culverhouse?"

"But the pin?" she cried.

"My wife set it in your hair before you started, for she wished to replace the one you gave to Lord Harry."

"She did not touch my hair today," cried the princess.

"Aye, but she did," said he. The princess suddenly felt to sobbing and she said: "Tell me the truth, tell me the truth. Surely it was in truth Lord Harry Culverhouse?"

Then Rudolf drew very close to her, and he said softly: "Sweet sister, the noble gentleman whom we knew, he whom I loved and who loved you in chivalrous deference, went from us two months ago. Be not troubled about him, for now all is well with him. But there was an unhappy man with you, who was not Harry Culverhouse, and who had murdered and mad thoughts in his heart. Yet at the end he died as readily and as nobly as our dear friend himself would have died for your sake. I pray you ask no more of him, but be contented to know that though he died by the sword yet he died in peace and willingly. But of our dear friend, as we knew him, think as much as you will, for the love of an honest gentleman is a good thing to think of."

The Princess Osa, hearing this, laid her hand in her brother's hand, and for a long while she did not speak. Then she said: "But our friend will not come again, Rudolf."

"No, you will never see our friend again," answered the king.

"Then when you see him—for I think you will see him once again—lay this pin in his hand and bid him take it and keep it for the sake of the love I bear him. Perhaps he will hear you."

"It may be. I cannot tell," said the king.

"And if he has the necklace," said she, "pray him to give that to you, and sell it, Rudolf, and give the value of it in gifts to the poor. Yes, to all that are unhappy and afflicted, even as the poor man who was with me tonight."

"So be it, Osa," said the king, and he kissed her. But she burst again suddenly into passionate weeping, calling God to witness that her face was a curse to her and a curse to her friends and praying the king to suffer her to take the veil in a convent, that she might trouble honest men no more. And thus he brought her in a sad plight to the palace and gave her into the arms of his wife, still sobbing bitterly. And he himself took the pin, and when the body of the mad trooper was found, with his own hand he covered the face and put the pin in the hand from which he took the ruby necklace, and he sold the necklace and used the proceeds of it as his sister had desired.

Thus the madness of Lord Harry Culverhouse, which was bred in him by the beauty of the Princess Osa, worked its way with him and brought him first into peril of great villainy and at last to death. And his name passed no more on the lips of any in Streisau nor between King Rudolf and his sister, while the story that the king had told to the troopers was believed by all, and none save the king knew what Lord Harry Culverhouse had done in his madness. But Osa mourned for him and for a long while she would go abroad or receive any of the princes or nobles who came to the court, but she was still, sick and full of grief, bemoaning the harm that she had wrought. Yet as time passed she grew again happy, for she was young and the world was sweet to her, and then, as King Rudolf had hidden her, she remembered Lord Harry Culverhouse as he had been before his madness came upon him. Yet still more did she remember how, even in his madness, he had done her no harm, but had watched beside her through the night and had, as morning dawned, entreated death at the hands of the king, preferring to die rather than that the talk of a single idle tongue should fall foully upon her name. Therefore she mourned for him with secret tears.

But he, although no monument marked his grave and although men spoke of him only as the mad trooper who had robbed the princess, yet slept soundly and at peace, and his right hand lay clinched upon his heart and in it the golden pin that had fastened the ruddy hair of Princess Osa.

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